



## 'This is not a game': Global virus death toll hits 2 million

In this Jan. 6, 2021, file photo, cemetery workers carry the remains of 89-year-old Abilio Ribeiro, who died of the coronavirus, to bury at the Nossa Senhora Aparecida cemetery in Manaus, Amazonas state, Brazil.

Associated Press

By CHRIS SHERMAN, MARIA CHENG, JOHN LEICESTER and JOSHUA GOODMAN  
Associated Press

**MEXICO CITY (AP)** — The global death toll from COVID-19 topped 2 million Friday, crossing the threshold amid a vaccine rollout so immense but so uneven that in some countries there

is real hope of vanquishing the outbreak, while in other, less-developed parts of the world, it seems a far-off dream.

The numbing figure was reached just over a year after the coronavirus was first detected in the Chinese city of Wuhan. The number of dead, compiled

by Johns Hopkins University, is about equal to the population of Brussels, Mecca, Minsk or Vienna. It is roughly equivalent to the Cleveland metropolitan area or the entire state of Nebraska.

"There's been a terrible amount of death," said Dr. Ashish Jha, a pandemic

expert and dean of Brown University's School of Public Health. At the same time, he said, "our scientific community has also done extraordinary work."

In wealthy countries including the United States, Britain, Israel, Canada and Germany, millions of citizens have already been

given some measure of protection with at least one dose of vaccine developed with revolutionary speed and quickly authorized for use.

But elsewhere, immunization drives have barely gotten off the ground.

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# Census numbers won't be released before change in power

By **MIKE SCHNEIDER**

**Associated Press**

Government attorneys and municipalities fighting over the 2020 census asked a judge Friday to put their court case on hold, as Department of Justice attorneys said the Census Bureau for now will not release numbers that could be used to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the process of divvying up congressional seats.

Department of Justice attorneys and attorneys for a coalition of municipalities and advocacy groups that had sued the Trump administration over the 2020 census asked U.S. District Judge Lucy Koh to suspend their court case for 21 days so the administration of President-elect Joe Biden can take power and decide how to proceed.

"Such a stay would permit the incoming Administration to evaluate the Census Bureau's and the Department of Commerce's operations and assess, among other things, the interests of the United States and its litigating positions in light of Plaintiffs' claims in this case," the attorneys said in a court filing Friday.

The Trump administration attorneys said the Census Bureau would not be releasing figures related to two orders from Presidential Donald Trump before the change in administrations. Trump's first order, issued in 2019, directed the Census Bureau to use administrative records to figure out who is in the country



**Steven Dillingham, the director of the U.S. Census Bureau, speaks outside the Oklahoma State Capitol, Friday, Sept. 18, 2020, in Oklahoma City, encouraging people to fill out their census form before the end of the month.**

illegally after the Supreme Court blocked his administration's effort to put a citizenship question on the 2020 census questionnaire. In a separate order last year, Trump instructed the Census Bureau, as part of the 2020 count of every U.S. resident, to provide data that would allow his administration to exclude people in the U.S. illegally from the numbers used for divvying up congressional seats among the states.

An influential GOP adviser had advocated excluding them from the apportionment process in order to favor Republicans and non-Hispanic whites, even though the Constitution spells out that every person in each state should be counted. Trump's unprec-

edented order on apportionment was challenged in more than a half-dozen lawsuits around the U.S., but the Supreme Court ruled last month that any challenge was premature. The court filing also said the Trump administration would not be releasing the numbers used for apportioning congressional seats among the states, and determining the distribution of \$1.5 trillion in federal funding, before the change in administrations.

A hearing in the case was scheduled for later Friday. Meanwhile, a group of Democratic lawmakers are joining civil right groups in calling for U.S. Census Bureau director Steven Dillingham's resignation after a watchdog agency said

he had set a deadline for pressured statisticians to produce a report on the number of people in the U.S. illegally.

Dillingham on Wednesday ordered an indefinite halt to the efforts to produce data showing the citizenship status of every U.S. resident through administrative records after facing blowback from civil rights groups and concerns raised by whistleblower statisticians about the accuracy of such figures.

A report by the Office of Inspector General on Wednesday said bureau workers were under significant pressure from two Trump political appointees to figure out who is in the U.S. illegally using federal and state administrative re-

cords, and Dillingham had set a Friday deadline for bureau statisticians to provide him a technical report on the effort.

After the release of the inspector general's report, leaders of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials, Asian Americans Advancing Justice and The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights called for Dillingham's resignation. Democratic lawmakers in Congress have followed suit in the past two days, saying Dillingham has allowed the Trump administration to politicize the 2020 census.

"The Trump administration waged a damaging campaign against the census with the intent of manipulating the results to be politically advantageous for the President and the Republican Party," said U.S. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire in a statement. "Census Director Steven Dillingham's failure to put country over loyalty to the President allowed these transgressions to occur and he therefore should resign." U.S. Rep. Judy Chu of California said in a statement that communities of color have borne the brunt of attacks on the census.

"Officials like Steven Dillingham who cannot put the needs of the nation over the demands of a twice impeached President should resign," said Chu, who chairs the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. □

# Trump to leave Washington on morning of Biden's inauguration



**In this Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2021, file photo, President Donald Trump arrives on the South Lawn of the White House, in Washington, after returning from Texas.**

**Associated Press**

By **JILL COLVIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE**

**Associated Press**

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — President Donald Trump will leave Washington next Wednesday morning, just before President-elect Joe Biden's inauguration, to begin his post-presidential life in Florida.

He will be sent off with a departure ceremony at Joint Base Andrews, according to a person familiar with the planning who

spoke on condition of anonymity because Trump's plans have not been formally announced. Officials are considering an elaborate event that would have the feel of a state visit, with a red carpet, color guard, military band and 21-gun salute all being discussed. Trump had already announced that he would not be attending Biden's inauguration — an historical break with tradition — after spending months mak-

ing baseless allegations of voter fraud in an attempt to delegitimize Biden's presidency. Vice President Mike Pence will attend in his place. Trump will leave Washington two weeks after he incited a violent insurrection, with his supporters storming the Capitol building in an attempt to halt the peaceful transition of power. Trump is expected to remain in Florida with a small group of aides as he mulls his future. □



# Transgender athletes look to changing of White House guard

By PAT EATON-ROBB  
Associated Press

Transgender athletes are getting an ally in the White House next week as they seek to participate as their identified gender in high school and college sports — although state legislatures, Congress and the courts are all expected to have their say this year, too. Attorneys on both sides say they expect President-elect Joe Biden's Department of Education will switch sides in two key legal battles — one in Connecticut, the other in Idaho — that could go a long way in determining whether transgender athletes are treated by the sex on their birth certificates or by how they identify.

Debate is also expected in statehouses. Last year, bills to restrict transgender athletes' participation to their gender assigned at birth were brought up in 17 states, although only one, Idaho's, became law.

It may ultimately fall to Congress to clarify once and for all whether Title IX, the civil rights law that guarantees equal opportunities for women and girls in education, protects or bars the participation of transgender females in women's sports, said Elizabeth Sharrow, an associate professor of public policy at the University of Massachusetts.

"I think if they do that, lawmakers at the state level can propose laws, but it doesn't mean those proposals are going to be taken seriously in the legislative bodies they serve in or that if the state passes those laws anyway that they would necessarily be



In this Feb. 7, 2019 file photo, Bloomfield High School transgender athlete Terry Miller, second from left, wins the final of the 55-meter dash over transgender athlete Andraya Yearwood, far left, and other runners in the Connecticut girls Class S indoor track meet at Hillhouse High School in New Haven, Conn.

Associated Press

considered legitimate," she said. "The courts will sort that out."

During his campaign, Biden committed to restoring transgender students' access to sports, bathrooms and locker rooms in accordance with their gender identity.

"States that like Idaho attempt to bar trans girls from girls sports, regardless of age of transition, medical intervention or anything else, with a new federal administration, will now be risking lawsuits by the federal government, Justice Department intervention and the loss of federal funding," said Chase Strangio, the American Civil Liberties Union's deputy director for transgender justice.

In Idaho, a law signed in March became the nation's first to prohibit trans-

gender students who identify as female from playing on female teams sponsored by public schools, colleges and universities. The law was supported by President Donald Trump's administration but blocked from implementation by a federal judge while a legal challenge by ACLU proceeds.

"Allowing males to enter our sports isn't fair," Madison Kenyon, a cross-country runner at Idaho State, said in a statement Friday. "It changes everything because it eliminates the connection between an athlete's effort and her success. Idaho's law helps make sure that, when women like me work hard, that hard work pays off, and we have a shot at winning."

In Connecticut, the Trump

administration intervened in support of a lawsuit filed by several non-transgender girls in Connecticut who were seeking to block a state policy that allows transgender athletes to compete in line with their identity. The plaintiffs argued transgender female runners had an unfair physical advantage.

But the two transgender runners at the center of that case said in court filings that being able to run against girls was central to their well-being.

"Running has been so important for my identity, my growth as a person, and my ability to survive in a world that discriminates against me," Andraya Yearwood wrote to the court. "I am thankful that I live in Connecticut where I can be treated as a girl in all as-

pects of life and not face discrimination at school."

Neither of the two closely watched cases is expected to be decided for months. A federal judge has scheduled a hearing for Feb. 26 on a request to dismiss the Connecticut lawsuit.

The ACLU and the Christian nonprofit Alliance Defending Freedom, which is fighting in Connecticut and Idaho to bar the participation of trans athletes, expect Biden's administration to declare that Title IX also protects transgender girls from discrimination.

Opponents say Title IX protects cisgender girls and allowing trans girls to participate against them is a violation of the statute.

"I think that is extremely concerning for the future of women's sports and would reverse nearly 50 years of gains for women under Title IX," said Christiana Holcomb, an attorney for the Alliance Defending Freedom. In states that have adopted policies on transgender participation high school sports, approaches have varied.

Currently, 14 states and the District of Columbia have policies similar to Connecticut's, according to Transathlete.com. Fourteen others allow transgender participation with certain conditions, such as hormone treatments or other proof the athlete is transitioning, according to the organization.

Opponents of bans are encouraged by Biden's victory and a 2020 Supreme Court decision that found that transgender people are protected from discrimination in employment. □

## NRA declares bankruptcy, plans to incorporate in Texas

By PAUL J. WEBER  
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The National Rifle Association announced Friday it has filed for bankruptcy and will seek to incorporate the nation's most politically influential gun-rights group in Texas instead of New York.

The announcement made on the NRA's website comes months after New York's attorney general sued the organization over claims that top executives illegally diverted tens of

millions of dollars for lavish personal trips, no-show contracts for associates and other questionable expenditures.

The coronavirus pandemic has also upended the NRA, which last year laid off dozens of employees, canceled its national convention and scuttled fundraising. Still, the NRA claimed in announcing the move that the organization was "in its strongest financial condition in years."

The NRA said it filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy

in a Dallas federal court.

"The move will enable long-term, sustainable growth and ensure the NRA's continued success as the nation's leading advocate for constitutional freedom — free from the toxic political environment of New York," the NRA said in a statement.

The gun-rights group boasts about 5 million members. Though headquartered in Virginia, the NRA was chartered as a nonprofit in New York in 1871 and is incorporated in the state. □



# White Army vet charged in shooting Black girl at Trump rally

By RYAN J. FOLEY

Associated Press

**IOWA CITY, Iowa (AP)** — A white military veteran shot and wounded a 15-year-old girl when he fired his gun into a car carrying four Black teenagers during a tense confrontation at a rally in support of President Donald Trump near the Iowa Capitol last month.

Michael McKinney, 25, is charged with attempted murder in the Dec. 6 shooting in Des Moines. McKinney, who was heavily armed and wearing body armor, told police he fired the shot in self-defense. A resident of tiny St. Charles, Iowa, McKinney has posted on Facebook in support of the far-right Proud Boys and against Black Lives Matter. In a news release detailing McKinney's arrest, the state police described an afternoon shooting at a parking lot and didn't mention the Trump car rally or the race of those involved. A city police spokesman said initial reports indicated the shooting was traffic-related. Division of Criminal Investigation spokesman Mitch Mortvedt said the agency released the immediate facts and circumstances as required.

But a review by The Associated Press shows the shooting was sparked by a belligerent political clash between a large group of white Trump supporters and four unarmed Black girls all aged 16 and under.



**Army veteran Michael McKinney, is shown in a Dec. 6, 2020 booking photo released by the Polk County Jail in Des Moines, Iowa.**

Associated Press

The teen driver's mother said the girls argued with Trump supporters about politics and were subjected to racial slurs. Rallygoers blamed the teens for starting the confrontation, saying they were harassing and threatening the crowd.

The girls' car ended up surrounded by Trump supporters who were yelling and honking horns before the driver went in reverse and struck a pickup. It's unclear whether the collision was accidental. McKinney told police he fired at that point to protect himself.

An investigator says in court documents that McKinney does not appear to be among those rallygoers who exchanged words with the girls before the shooting. Bystander video obtained by police shows McKinney approaching the vehicle, pulling a handgun

from his waistband and firing into the car from 15 feet (4.5 meters) away, according to court documents.

The bullet hit the leg of a girl who had been arguing with members of the crowd through the vehicle's sunroof. The car sped off to take her to a hospital.

The 73-year-old owner of the pickup, Bob Brekke Jr., told AP he was glad that McKinney shot into the car and scared the girls away, saying he worried that they might be armed.

"I felt relieved," said Brekke, whose truck was scratched in the collision.

Brekke said the girls had been yelling anti-Trump epithets at him and others as the rally progressed through the heavily Democratic city. He said their vehicle drove wildly, veering in and out of the caravan, and followed it to the parking lot where the route

concluded.

Fans of the president, who were gathering to support his attempts to subvert the November election, initially "were having fun" taunting the girls, Brekke said.

Brekke, a retired airport security worker, said he asked whether they were on welfare and unemployed. He said they called him a white supremacist and threatened him and his wife.

McKinney's attorney, Kent Balducci, said the Jan. 6 mob attack at the U.S. Capitol that included many ex-military members won't help his client's case, because the public will draw comparisons.

But he argued that the "political factors are extraneous" and that McKinney's actions should be viewed as self-defense. The teenage driver may have been using the vehicle as a weapon instead of merely trying to flee the angry crowd, he said.

Trump supporters have blasted authorities for charging McKinney, arguing that his shot protected rallygoers. They include an Iowa Department of Public Safety employee who organized the event and has fundraised for McKinney's defense. McKinney, who left the Iowa National Guard in 2017 after a five-year military career, faces 25 years in prison if convicted. McKinney remains jailed after a judge last month rejected his request

to reduce a \$500,000 bond. Danielle Gross, the teen driver's mother, said her daughter was so traumatized by the shooting that injured her cousin that she didn't leave the house for a week afterward. She said the girls made an ill-advised decision to confront rallygoers and that the situation escalated quickly.

"They were saying some racist slurs and the girls argued with them and it went from there," Gross said, adding that she hasn't heard from the police since the day of the shooting and that she fears for her family's safety.

Authorities declined comment on whether the shooting might have been motivated by race. Polk County Attorney John Sarcone noted that the attempted murder charge against McKinney carries far more prison time than a state hate crime charge, with a maximum of five years.

After the shooting, McKinney apparently tried to cover his tracks, putting the spent shell casing in the trunk of his car and not initially coming forward as the shooter, court records show.

After others identified him, he admitted his role and surrendered his pistol. Police say he was carrying two loaded magazines in his pants and had another firearm in his vehicle, which was outfitted with Trump decals. □

## Creighton dorm evacuated after student tries to make ricin



**An Omaha police officer stands inside of the Davis Square Apartments at Creighton University on Friday, Jan. 15, 2021.**

Associated Press

**OMAHA, Neb. (AP)** — Police and firefighters evacu-

ated a Creighton University dormitory after a student at the Nebraska school told emergency room staff that she had tried to make the poison ricin in her dorm room in an attempt to harm herself.

Officials also temporarily shut down the Creighton University Medical Center emergency room on the university's campus in Omaha as a precaution, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

The scramble to head off any possible ricin exposure began around 9 p.m. Thurs-

day, when police were contacted, Omaha Police Officer Joseph Nickerson said.

The woman told emergency room staff that the ricin-making materials were still in her dorm room, so staffers contacted police and fire departments, Nickerson said.

About 50 Creighton students were evacuated from Davis Square apartments and moved to other campus housing.

Nickerson said a hazardous materials crew cleaned the building. Normally, about

260 students would occupy Davis Square, officials said, but the coronavirus pandemic has closed in-person classes at the university, leading to fewer students living in dorms.

Ricin is a poison found naturally in castor beans. When extracted and purified, it can be used as a lethal poison.

A few milligrams is enough to kill an adult if it's eaten, injected or inhaled. There is no antidote for ricin poisoning, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. □



# The buck stops here: Dutch govt quits over welfare scandal

By **MIKE CORDER**

**Associated Press**

**THE HAGUE, Netherlands**

**(AP)** — Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and his entire Cabinet resigned Friday to take political responsibility for a scandal involving investigations into child welfare payments that wrongly labeled thousands of parents as fraudsters.

In a nationally televised speech, Rutte said he had informed King Willem-Alexander of his decision and pledged that his government would continue work to compensate affected parents as quickly as possible and to battle the coronavirus.

"We are of one mind that if the whole system has failed, we all must take responsibility, and that has led to the conclusion that I have just offered the king, the resignation of the entire Cabinet," Rutte said.

Not long after delivering his statement, Rutte got on his bicycle and rode to the king's palace in a forest in The Hague to formally inform the king. Dutch television showed him parking his bike at the bottom of steps leading into the palace and walking inside.

The move was seen as largely symbolic; Rutte's government will remain in office in a caretaker mode until a new coalition is formed after a March 17 election in the Netherlands. The resignation brings to an



In this Thursday, Oct. 26, 2017, file photo, Prime Minister Mark Rutte, center left, and Dutch King Willem-Alexander, center, pose with the ministers for the official photo of the new Dutch government on the steps of Royal Palace Noordeinde in The Hague, Netherlands.

**Associated Press**

end a decade in office for Rutte, although his party is expected to win the election, putting him first in line to begin talks to form the next government. If he succeeds in forming a new coalition, Rutte would most likely again become prime minister.

Geert Wilders, leader of the largest opposition party in the Dutch parliament said it was the right decision for the government to quit.

"Innocent people have been criminalized, their lives destroyed and parliament was informed about it inaccurately and incompletely," he tweeted.

The Netherlands is the third European country thrown into political uncertainty this week in the midst of the coronavirus crisis. In Estonia, the government resigned over a corruption scandal, while Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte's governing coalition is at risk of collapse after a small partner party withdrew its support. Rutte said earlier this week that his government would be able to keep taking tough policy decisions in the battle against the coronavirus even if it were in caretaker mode. The Netherlands is in a tough lockdown until at least Feb.

9, and the government is considering imposing an overnight curfew amid fears about new, more contagious variants of the virus.

"To the Netherlands I say: Our struggle against the coronavirus will continue," Rutte said.

Jesse Klaver, the leader of one opposition party, told national broadcaster NOS he would continue to support the government in its coronavirus campaign.

On Thursday, the leader of the opposition Labor Party stepped down because he was minister of social affairs in a coalition led by Rutte

when the country's tax office implemented a tough policy of tracking down fraud with child welfare.

A sitting minister, Eric Wiebes, who also was linked to the scandal, said Friday he was resigning with immediate effect and would not be part of the caretaker administration.

At Friday's Cabinet meeting, ministers decided their reaction to a scathing parliamentary report issued last month, titled "Unprecedented Injustice," that said the tax office policies violated "fundamental principles of the rule of law." The report also criticized the government for the way it provided information to parliament about the scandal.

Many wrongfully accused parents were plunged into debt when tax officials demanded repayment of payments. The government has in the past apologized for the tax office's methods and in March earmarked 500 million euros (\$607 million) to compensate more than 20,000 parents.

In a written reaction, the government pledged to reform the welfare system as a result of the scandal and to quickly pay affected parents 30,000 euros (\$36,300) and expand existing compensation schemes.

"Everything is aimed at offering the parents and their children a new start in life," the government said. □

## Turkish leader defiant on Russian system but wants U.S. jets

**ISTANBUL (AP)** — Turkey's president has criticized the United States for kicking his country out of the F-35 stealth jet program after Ankara purchased a Russian missile defense system, a move that also triggered U.S. sanctions.

Speaking after Friday prayers in Istanbul, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Turkey paid "very serious money" for the F-35 fighters but hasn't received them.

"This is a very serious mistake that America, as an allied country, has done to us," Erdogan said.

"I hope with Mr. Biden assuming office and with discussions, he will take more positive steps and we can straighten this out," he added. Turkey was removed from the F-35 program even though it produced some parts for the jets. The U.S. said the Russian system could jeopardize the safety of the F-35s.

The U.S. halted the training of Turkish pilots and said Turkey would not be allowed to take final possession of the four aircraft it bought. Erdogan remained defiant, saying the country was in continued dialogue

with Russia about a "second package" of the S-400 surface-to-air missile system and would discuss details at the end of the month. Turkey received the first batch of the system in 2019 and tested it in the fall. Washington also sanctioned four Turkish defense officials last month under the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, a U.S. law aimed at thwarting Russian influence. The sanctions, which included a ban on issuing export licenses to Turkey's Presidency of Defense Industries, were the first time



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan speaks to the media after Friday prayers, in Istanbul, Friday, Jan. 15, 2021.

**Associated Press**

the law was used to punish a NATO ally.

"No country can decide

on the steps we will take for our defense industry," Erdogan said. □



# 'This is not a game': Global virus death toll hits 2 million



In this Dec. 17, 2020, file photo, mourners attend the funeral of a woman who died from COVID-19 at a cemetery in the outskirts of the city of Ghaemshahr, in northern Iran.

Associated Press

## Continued from Front

Many experts are predicting another year of loss and hardship in places like Iran, India, Mexico and Brazil, which together account for about a quarter of the world's deaths.

"As a country, as a society, as citizens we haven't understood," lamented Israel Gomez, a Mexico City paramedic who spent months shuttling COVID-19 patients around by ambulance, desperately looking for vacant hospital beds. "We have not understood that this is not a game, that this really exists."

Mexico, a country of 130 million people, has received just 500,000 doses of vaccine and has put barely half of those into the arms of health care workers.

That's in sharp contrast to the situation for its wealthier northern neighbor. Despite early delays, hundreds of thousands of people are rolling up their sleeves every day in the United States, where the virus has killed about 390,000, by far the highest toll of any country. All told, over 35 million doses

of various COVID-19 vaccines have been administered around the world, according to the University of Oxford.

While vaccination drives in rich countries have been hamstrung by long lines, inadequate budgets and a patchwork of state and local approaches, the obstacles are far greater in poorer nations, which can have weak health systems, crumbling transportation networks, entrenched corruption and a lack of reliable electricity to keep vaccines cold enough.

Also, the majority of the world's COVID-19 vaccine doses have already been snapped up by wealthy countries. COVAX, a U.N.-backed project to supply shots to developing parts of the world, has found itself short of vaccine, money and logistical help.

As a result, the World Health Organization's chief scientist warned it is highly unlikely that herd immunity — which would require at least 70% of the globe to be vaccinated — will be achieved this year. As the disaster has demonstrated,

it is not enough to snuff out the virus in a few places.

"Even if it happens in a couple of pockets, in a few countries, it's not going to protect people across the world," Dr. Soumya Swaminathan said this week.

Health experts fear, too, that if shots are not distributed widely and fast enough, it could give the virus time to mutate and defeat the vaccine — "my nightmare scenario," as Jha put it.

U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres said the 2 million milestone "has been made worse by the absence of a global coordinated effort." He added: "Science has succeeded, but solidarity has failed."

Meanwhile, in Wuhan, where the scourge was discovered in late 2019, a global team of researchers led by WHO arrived Thursday on a politically sensitive mission to investigate the origins of the virus, which is believed to have spread to humans from wild animals. The Chinese city of 11 million people is bustling again, with few signs it was once the epicenter of the catastrophe, locked down

for 76 days, with over 3,800 dead.

"We are not fearful or worried as we were in the past," said Qin Qiong, a noodle shop owner. "We now live a normal life. I take the subway every day to come to work in the shop. ... Except for our customers, who have to wear masks, everything else is the same."

It took eight months to hit 1 million dead but less than four months after that to reach the next million.

"What was never on the horizon is that so many of the deaths would be in the richest countries in the world," said Dr. Bharat Pankhania, an infectious diseases expert at Britain's University of Exeter. "That the world's richest countries would mismanage so badly is just shocking."

In rich and poor countries alike, the crisis has devastated economies, thrown multitudes out of work and plunged many into poverty.

In Europe, where more than a quarter of the world's deaths have taken place, strict lockdowns and curfews have been reimposed

to beat back a resurgence of the virus, and a new variant that is believed to be more contagious is circulating in Britain and other countries, as well as the U.S. Even in some of the wealthiest countries, the vaccination drives have been slower than expected. France, with the second-largest economy in Europe and more than 69,000 known virus deaths, will need years, not months, to vaccinate its 53 million adults unless it sharply speeds up its rollout, hampered by shortages, red tape and considerable suspicion of the vaccines.

Still, in places like Poissy, a blue-collar town west of Paris, the first shots of the Pfizer formula were met with relief and a sense that there is light at the end of the pandemic tunnel.

"We have been living inside for nearly a year. It's not a life," said Maurice Lachkar, a retired 78-year-old acupuncturist who was put on the priority list for vaccination because of his diabetes and his age. "If I catch the virus I am done."

Maurice and his wife, Nicole, who also got vaccinated, said they might even allow themselves hugs with their two children and four grandchildren, whom they have seen from a socially safe distance only once or twice since the pandemic hit.

"It is going to be liberating," he said.

Throughout the developing world, the images are strikingly similar: rows and rows of graves being dug, hospitals pushed to the limit and medical workers dying for lack of protective gear.

In Peru, which has the highest COVID-19 fatality rate in Latin America, hundreds of health care workers went on strike this week to demand better pay and working conditions in a country where 230 doctors have died of the disease. In Brazil, authorities in the Amazon rainforest's biggest city planned to transfer hundreds of patients out because of a dwindling supply of oxygen tanks that has resulted in some people dying at home. □



# Mexico president accuses DEA of fabricating general's case

By CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN  
and MARK STEVENSON

Associated Press

**MEXICO CITY (AP)** — One day after Mexico's Attorney General's Office announced it was dropping the drug trafficking case against its former defense secretary, Mexico President Andrés Manuel López Obrador said Friday that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration had "fabricated" the accusations against retired Gen. Salvador Cienfuegos.

López Obrador said there was a lack of professionalism in the U.S. investigation and suggested that there could have been political motivations behind U.S. authorities' arrest of Cienfuegos at Los Angeles International Airport in October, noting that the investigation had been ongoing for years, but the arrest came shortly before U.S. presidential elections.

The president said that Mexican prosecutors had dropped the case because the evidence shared by the United States had no value to prove he committed any crime.

"Why did they do the investigation like that?" López Obrador said. "Without support, without proof?"

Asked whether Mexicans would feel disillusioned with his government's promise to root out corruption, López Obrador said they would cover up for no one. "We're not going to fabricate crimes. We're not going to make up anything," he said.

"We have to act based on the facts, the evidence, the realities."

López Obrador acknowledged a prevailing confidence in the U.S. justice system among Mexicans. "Those are the good judges, flawless, those don't make mistakes, those are honest," he said people would say. "In this case, with all respect, those that did this investigation did not act with professionalism."

On Friday, Nicole Navas Oxman, acting deputy director of public affairs at the U.S. Department of Jus-



In this Sept. 14, 2016 file photo, Secretary of Defense Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda arrives for a review of the troops that will participate in the Independence Day parade, in Mexico City.

Associated Press

tice said, "The United States reserves the right to recommence its prosecution of Cienfuegos if the Government of Mexico fails to do so."

López Obrador said the evidence shared by the U.S. against Cienfuegos would be made public, because the people should see and it had been a strike against Mexico's prestige.

In a statement Thursday night, Mexico's Attorney General's Office went beyond just announcing they were closing the case. Its statement cleared the general entirely.

"The conclusion was reached that General Salvador Cienfuegos Zepeda never had any meeting with the criminal organization investigated by American authorities, and that he also never had any communication with them, nor did he carry out acts to protect or help those individuals," the office said in a statement.

It said Cienfuegos had not been found to have any il-

licit or abnormal income, nor was any evidence found "that he had issued any order to favor the criminal group in question."

A seven-year investigation by the U.S. authorities was completely disproved by Cienfuegos within five days of having the U.S. evidence shown to him, the statement said.

All charges were dropped and Cienfuegos, who was never placed under arrest after he was returned by U.S. officials, is no longer under investigation.

If the investigation had been underway for seven years, why was Cienfuegos arrested days before U.S. elections, especially since he had also flown to the U.S. in March, López Obrador asked.

"What was the message? Who from? What were they trying to do, weaken the Mexican government, weaken Mexico's armed forces, spark a conflict with the government?"

Gladys McCormick, an associate professor in his-

tory at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, said the only surprise was that Mexico didn't make a better show of looking into Cienfuegos.

"One would think that they would have at least followed through on some semblance of an investigation, even if it was just to put some window dressing on the illusion that the rule of law exists," McCormick said.

"From the Mexican side, this signals the deep-seated control the military as an institution has on power. It also shows that the level of complicity at play in this case."

López Obrador has given the military more responsibility and power than any president in recent history, relying on them to build massive infrastructure projects and most recently to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine, in addition to their expanded security responsibilities.

Cienfuegos was arrested

in Los Angeles in October, after he was secretly indicted by a federal grand jury in New York in 2019. He was accused of conspiring with the H-2 cartel in Mexico to smuggle thousands of kilos of cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana while he was defense secretary from 2012 to 2018.

Prosecutors said intercepted messages showed that Cienfuegos accepted bribes in exchange for ensuring the military did not take action against the cartel and that operations were initiated against its rivals. He was also accused of introducing cartel leaders to other corrupt Mexican officials.

Under the pressure of Mexico's implicit threats to restrict or expel U.S. agents, U.S. prosecutors dropped their case so Cienfuegos could be returned to Mexico and investigated under Mexican law.

Acting U.S. Attorney Seth DuCharme told a judge at the time,

"The United States determined that the broader interest in maintaining that relationship in a cooperative way outweighed the department's interest and the public's interest in pursuing this particular case."

Even though the U.S. yielded on Cienfuegos, Mexico's Congress a few weeks later passed a law that will restrict U.S. agents in Mexico and remove their diplomatic immunity.

Mike Vigil, the Drug Enforcement Administration's former chief of international operations, said clearing Cienfuegos "could be the straw that broke the camel's back as far as U.S.-Mexico cooperation in counter-drug activities."

"It was preordained that Mexican justice would not move forward with prosecuting General Cienfuegos," Vigil said.

"It will greatly stain the integrity of its judicial system and despite the political rhetoric of wanting to eliminate corruption, such is obviously not the case. The rule of law has been significantly violated." □



# LOCAL



**ORANJESTAD — Many of our visitors consider our One Happy Island as their home away from home, so we thought it is a good idea for you to know the history of Aruba. Here's our story in a nutshell.**

## What's in a name

Most probably, the name Aruba is of Indian origin, a combination of ora (shell) and oubao (island). But it might also be from Spanish: oro hubo (there was gold). The earliest mention on a map spells Orua.

## The pre-Columbian era

Before the discovery of Aruba by the Spaniards,

the island was inhabited by Indians, first by the Arawaks and later the Caribs. They lived of catching fish and collecting natural food.

## The Spaniards, the Dutch and the English

Aruba was discovered by the Spaniards in 1499. In the 16th century, the Spaniards deported the entire Indian population and sent them away to the island of Hispaniola to work in copper mines. In the 17th century, the Dutch conquered the Windward islands. On Aruba horses and mainly goats were bred. Between 1806 and 1816, Aruba was occupied by the English.

## Aloe, gold and phosphate

De aloe plant was particularly suitable for the soil and the climate of Aruba. As of the 19th century, the juice is exported and since 1947 there is an aloe factory on Aruba. In 1824, gold was found on Aruba and phosphate in 1859. Both industries were the first important source of income for the Aruban people. De gold digging continued up to the First World War (1914) and the exploitation of phosphate was also halted in the beginning of the 20th

century.

## The Lago

The most important change in the past century for Aruba was the establishment of the Lago Oil and Transport Company. The founding of this refinery prompted the need of foreign labor and they came mainly from the English speaking islands in the Caribbean. They established themselves in San Nicolas.

## The history of Aruba

In 1986, the outdated Lago closed but the refinery was soon reopened by another oil company.

### Aruba and World War II

Aruba was home to one of the biggest refineries in the world, supplying a substantial part of the fuel to the allied troops. That's why the island was targeted by a German submarine. Fortunately, the attack was a major failure. Aruba had been spared massive damage

### Striving for Separation

In the beginning of the thirties of the past century, Aruba officially announced to the Government of the Dutch Kingdom its wish to separate from Curaçao. Jan Hendrik (Henny) Eman and Shon A Eman were the advocates of 'Separación' (separation).

### The struggle for 'Status Aparte'

In the course of the seventies, a movement came about that aimed to dissolve Aruba from the administrative unit of the Netherlands Antilles. After a couple of turbulent weeks

in August 1977, the call for independence was recognized by the Dutch government, which resulted in obtaining the so-called 'Status Aparte': in 1986, Aruba became an independent country within the Dutch Kingdom.

### Betico Croes

The young and dynamic politician Gilberto François ('Betico') Croes from Santa Cruz founded the political party Movimiento Electoral di Pueblo (MEP) in 1971. As leader of this party, he was an advocate of the realization of the 'Status Aparte' for Aruba in the seventies and eighties. He died in the year the Status Aparte took effect, 1986

### Tourism

In 1959, the first major resort on Palm Beach was constructed. Next to the Aruba Caribbean Hotel, other so-called High-rise hotels were built. Several smaller hotels were built as well, like those on Eagle Beach. Tourism has grown to become the major employer on the island, next to the refinery. Source: <http://www.historiaruba.aw/>. □





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## Art at Cas di Cultura

ORANJESTAD — Cas di Cul-  
tura (Dutch: Cultuurhuis) is  
the home of the national  
theater, concert stage, ex-  
hibition and cultural center  
of Aruba, located at the  
'Las Americas' roundabout  
in Oranjestad. Tonight will  
be the opening of the exhi-  
bition "Soca Art-Raise your  
voice!" by Aruban artist  
Sharina Gumbs.

Gumbs will be present dur-  
ing the opening of the ex-  
position to show her art.  
The evening starts at 7pm  
and closes at 9pm, the  
exhibition will stay to visit  
until March 4th. This expo-  
sition forms part of an ex-  
perimental pilot program  
about Visual Art projects at  
Cas di Cultura.

The goal is to support this  
type of art on the island.  
The artist is open to connect  
with her public and explain  
about her art. Naturally all  
the necessary Covid-19  
measurements including  
face mask obligation are

in place here. Admission is  
free.

## About the artist

"My aim is to passionately  
and intuitively reflect  
authentic identity and  
strength through colorful,  
fluid and expressive ab-  
stract paintings," Gumbs  
says on saatchiart.com.  
She was born in Aruba and  
immigrated to the Nether-  
lands at the age of seven  
with her mother, brothers  
and sister.

Growing up with an absent  
father and a strong inde-  
pendent single mother of  
five, has in many ways in-  
fluenced her development.  
As a child she was very in-  
trovert and in drawing peo-  
ple, found a way to express  
herself and give meaning  
to the world around her.  
"My interest in the human  
character led to an initial  
profession as a social work-  
er and later an education  
in behavioral science (Orto  
pedagogy). For 20 years I  
have worked in psychiatric



care, community develop-  
ment, drug- and alcohol  
care and child & youth  
welfare.

It wasn't until her early for-  
ties that I followed my child-  
hood passion and started a  
part-time education in art  
(2009-2012)." At the same  
time she continued to work

as a social worker, stud-  
ied Orto pedagogy (2007-  
2012) and as a single moth-  
er had full-time care of her  
children. Needless to say  
that at some point she felt  
out of control and had to  
make a choice regarding  
the focus and balance in  
her life. What followed was  
a long journey of reflections  
on her values, relationships  
and authentic identity. A  
journey of choices.  
In 2014 she returned to her  
island of birth (Aruba).

that I feel, into an authentic  
(abstract) portrait."  
On June 13, 2019 Dutch  
Culture-Minister Ingrid van  
Engelshoven awarded  
Gumbs with the Golden  
C 2019 as a project you  
have to experience. The  
jury chose (incl. Audience  
votes) for 'Re-fill your cup  
with authenticity' by the  
Aruban artist.q

For more information about  
the exhibition visit Face-  
book Cas di Cultura.□



"On one hand my abstract  
artwork reveals a very col-  
orful, dynamic and intuitive  
reflection on my own iden-  
tity, life and (spiritual) de-  
velopment. On the other  
hand, there's a strong drive  
to reflect on my subjects. I  
use photos or do interviews  
as a basis for my abstract  
portraits. This way of work-  
ing allows me to be a silent  
observer and listener in or-  
der to transform the energy



## Sand Logic

The famous Divi Divi tree is  
actually called Watapana. They  
all point SouthWest due to the  
trade winds.

The tree works just like a  
compass. So, when you're lost  
look for one they are pointing to  
the highrise hotels area.



# At least ten reef-associated shark species in the Dutch Caribbean



**WAGENINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS — Wageningen Marine Research reported ten reef-associated shark species in the Dutch Caribbean in a published study as part of Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA)'s Save Our Sharks Project. The most common species are the nurse shark and the Caribbean reef shark. Overall, more sharks were observed in conservation areas than in unprotected areas, highlighting the importance of these zones in shark conservation.**

More than 100 million sharks are killed each year as a result of fishing and shark finning activities, twice the rate at which they can reproduce. The demand for fins and other shark products has driven a number of species close to extinction. Sharks are especially vulnerable to overfishing and habitat degradation as they are late to mature and produce few young. The main threats to sharks in our waters are accidental bycatch, habitat degradation and the risk of a shark fin market developing, which would lead to targeted fishing of sharks.

We need healthy oceans and healthy oceans need sharks

Sharks keep our oceans healthy. These top predators remove sick or weak members of their prey populations. A decrease in number of sharks leads to a disturbed natural balance in the sea. This can affect the overall fish population, and good fish stocks are not only important for fishermen that depend on fishing but also for (dive) tourism and the local community.

## Respect, not fear, sharks

Sharks are some of the most misunderstood species. For generations sharks had an undeserved bad reputation. People tend to see them as terrifying animals that pose a danger to everything that swims in the ocean, including humans. But we now know that is very far from the truth; these magnificent creatures are essential to healthy oceans and risks to humans are small.

## DCNA's Save Our Sharks Project

There is a lack of knowledge concerning the distribution and abundance of shark and ray species throughout the Dutch Caribbean. To combat this knowledge gap, from 2015-2018, DCNA ran the "Save our Sharks" (SOS) project for the Dutch Caribbean, funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery. In this project DCNA collaborated with local fisherman and scientists and aimed to build popular support for shark and ray conservation amongst the local community, as well as increasing knowledge about shark and ray species within the region by conducting a number of research projects.

## Shark Research

A recently published study by Wageningen Marine Research as part of DCNA's SOS Project es-

tablished a baseline for current shark diversity, distribution, abundance, spatial behaviour and population structure for inshore reefs around the Dutch Caribbean islands.

There were two methods used by the researchers to study sharks. One method used Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) which used a device consisting of two cameras set in front of a baited feed bag. The idea is that as sharks come near the bait bag to feed, video footage can be collected to identify and count local shark populations. The other method was acoustic telemetry to track sharks. In this method, a small acoustic tracking device is implanted within the shark. Acoustic receivers are installed at specific locations, and whenever sharks with these transmitters travel near the receiver (within a range of 450 to 850 metres) they are recorded.

The first studies using BRUV were conducted on Saba, Saba Bank and St. Eustatius to better understand the local population of sharks and rays and their relative abundances, and were funded by the Dutch Government. Starting in 2015, as part of the SOS project, additional studies were conducted to include the waters around Bonaire, Curaçao and Sint Maarten. In 2017 a BRUV survey was done at Aruba, financed by Global Finprint.

In addition, as part of the SOS project, acoustic telemetry was also used to better understand the movements of sharks, habitat use, migration and connectivity between islands. The telemetry study tracked two shark species, Caribbean reef shark (*Carcharhinus perezii*) and nurse shark (*Ginglymostoma cirratum*) around Saba (from 2014) and then around Saba Bank, Sint Maarten and Sint Eustatius (from 2015).



**Nurse shark on the Saba Bank which is part of the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary.**

Photo credit: Hans Leijnse (SHAPE/DCNA)



**Caribbean reef shark in the Man of War Shoal Marine Park, Sint Maarten.**

Photo credit: Melanie Meijer zu Schlochtern

## Findings

In BRUVs deployed around Sint Maarten, Curaçao and Bonaire the most common detected shark species were Caribbean reef shark, with Sint Maarten also frequently showing nurse sharks. Overall, more sharks were observed in marine parks or areas of conservation than in unprotected areas, highlighting the importance of these zones in shark conservation. Furthermore, when comparing the BRUV surveys from Sint Maarten, Curaçao and Bonaire to previous BRUV studies from Aruba, Saba, Sint Eustatius and Saba Bank, it showed that the Aruba survey had the largest shark diversity (8 species) and the Bonaire survey the lowest (2 species). The Saba survey documented 5 shark species, Saba bank had 4 shark species with Curaçao, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten each registering 3 shark species. There was an additional BRUV submarine test at 300 metres deep off Curaçao which found an additional shark species (Cuban dogfish). In total, at least 10 shark species were seen within the Dutch Caribbean in the different BRUV surveys.

The acoustic telemetry studies demonstrated that both the Caribbean reef shark and nurse shark have small home ranges and strong site fidelity. Large crossings between areas were rare, and found for two Caribbean reef sharks and one nurse shark which travelled between Saba and Saba bank. The two Caribbean reef sharks made short directed journeys back and forth, whereas the nurse shark after two years absence showed up at the Saba Bank before returning to Saba. One nurse shark from another study on the US Virgin Islands was detected in the network on the Saba Bank, a distance of at least 160 kilometres.

## Importance of Protected Areas

Both the BRUV and acoustic telemetry studies showed higher presence of reef associated sharks within the conservation zones, along with high site fidelity and small home ranges. Furthermore, as some longer distance movements were also documented, interconnectivity between these areas is just beginning to be understood. The ongoing study on acoustic telemetry (funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (LNV)) will yield more data on this. Therefore, not only are local marine parks crucial for the conservation efforts of sharks and rays, but larger conservation networks, such as the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary which comprises all the waters of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius, are vital to protect entire populations. □



# Optimistic banks start moving 'bad' loans back to 'good'

By **KEN SWEET**

AP Business Writer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) —

The pandemic and recession aren't over by a long shot, but banks are feeling optimistic enough to start taking potentially "bad" loans off their books and move them back into the "good" pile.

The financial performance of the big U.S. banks has improved from earlier in 2020, when the virus pandemic walloped the global economy. JPMorgan and Wells Fargo saw fourth quarter profits rise; Citigroup's profit fell in the last quarter of 2020, but increased from the third quarter.

The three banks have a more positive, though cautious outlook for the economy, which was reflected in an accounting maneuver each employed that contributed significantly to their better results.

JPMorgan reported a record profit of \$12.14 billion, up from a profit of \$8.52 billion a year earlier. Roughly a quarter of that profit — \$2.9 billion — came from JPMorgan "releasing" some of the funds it had set aside last year to cover potential loan losses caused by the



A Wells Fargo office is shown, Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2021 in New York.

pandemic and subsequent recession. Citigroup had a similar story, releasing \$1.5 billion of its loan-loss reserves that it had set aside earlier last year. Wells Fargo released a modest amount of money from its reserves — less than \$200 million.

Still, those amounts are just a fraction of the tens of billions of dollars into their so-called loan-loss reserves to cover potentially bad loans in the first months of

the pandemic. Banks are required to set aside loans that may become unpayable on their balance sheet to show whether they have enough money to meet depositors' and regulators' needs.

This largely had to do because millions of customers and businesses who were financially fine in February 2020 were suddenly in deep trouble in March 2020, as local and state governments

shut their economies down to combat the early stages of the pandemic.

But trillions of dollars' worth of government stimulus and the reopening of businesses in many parts of the country has resulted in less financial carnage than what bank executives and investors initially expected. Notably the Paycheck Protection Program, which helped businesses cover basic expenses like payroll,

helped keep some businesses afloat. "The fear of a wave of COVID-related bankruptcies has not occurred," said Octavio Marenzi, CEO of Opimas, a capital markets management consultancy firm.

In releasing funds from loan-loss reserves, the banks cited the improvement in the economy. Though still not fully recovered from the shutdowns of March and April, the economic picture is better than it was six or nine months ago. And with mass vaccination efforts now underway, banks are feeling a bit better on where things stand.

But there's still a significant degree of uncertainty when it comes to the banks. JPMorgan still has more than \$30 billion tied up in its loan-loss reserves, and banks like Citi and Wells have similar figures on their balance sheets.

"Thank God for the vaccine," said Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, in a call with reporters on Friday. But the same breath, Dimon said that "all bets are off" on how the U.S. economy may go if the vaccine isn't as effective as expected. □

Associated Press

# Xi asks Starbucks' Schultz to help repair U.S.-China ties

By **JOE McDONALD**

AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) —

President Xi Jinping is asking former CEO Howard Schultz of Starbucks to help repair U.S.-Chinese relations that have plunged to their lowest level in decades amid a tariff war and tension over technology and security.

A letter from Xi to Schultz reported Friday by the official Xinhua News Agency was a rare direct communication from China's paramount leader to a foreign business figure. Schultz opened Starbucks' first China outlet in 1999 and is a frequent visitor. Xi wrote to Schultz "to encourage him and Starbucks to continue to play an active role in promoting Chinese-U.S. economic and trade cooperation and the development of bilateral relations," Xinhua

reported. No text of the letter was released.

In a statement issued Friday, Schultz didn't directly address Xi's request to help repair relations, instead saying it was "a great honor" to receive the letter from China's president.

Schultz said Xi was replying to a letter Schultz recently sent him along with a Chinese-language edition of his book, "From the Ground Up: A Journey to Reimagine the Promise of America." Xinhua reported that Schultz congratulated Xi on "the completion of a well-off society" under his leadership. Schultz didn't release a copy of his letter to Xi, but he said he shared his respect for the Chinese people and culture.

In his statement, Schultz said he has formed many close relationships with Star-

bucks' employees in China, which is Starbucks' biggest market outside the United States. It has 4,700 stores and 58,000 employees in almost 190 Chinese cities.

"I truly believe Starbucks best days are ahead in China and that the values of creativity, compassion, community and hard work will guide the company toward an even greater business and community contribution, while continuing to build common ground for cooperation between our two countries," Schultz said in his statement.

Starbucks said it had no comment. Schultz stepped down as Starbucks' CEO in 2017 and retired as chairman of the company in 2018. He briefly considered running for president as an independent in 2019.

Xinhua gave no indication



In this Jan. 31, 2019, file photo, former Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz speaks at an event to promote his book, "From the Ground Up," in Seattle.

Associated Press

whether the letter reflected an initiative to ask American corporate leaders to help change policy after President-elect Joe Biden takes office next week.

Economists and political analysts say Biden is likely to try to revive coopera-

tion with Beijing over North Korea and other political issues. But few changes on trade are expected due to widespread frustration in Washington over China's human rights record and accusations of technology theft. □



# U.S. blacklists Xiaomi, CNOOC, Skyrizon, raising heat on China

By ZEN SOO

AP Technology Writer

**HONG KONG (AP)** — The U.S. government has black-listed Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp. and China's third-largest national oil company for alleged military links, heaping pressure on Beijing in President Donald Trump's last week in office.

The Department of Defense added nine companies to its list of Chinese firms with military links, including Xiaomi and state-owned plane manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp. of China (Comac).

U.S. investors will have to divest their stakes in Chinese companies on the military list by November this year, according to an executive order signed by Trump last November.

"The Company will take appropriate course of actions to protect the interests of the Company and its stakeholders," the statement read, although Xiaomi did not elaborate on what those actions might be. Xiaomi Corp. overtook Ap-



In this July 9, 2018, file photo, an advertisement for Xiaomi is displayed at a subway station in Hong Kong.

Associated Press

ple Inc. as the world's No. 3 smartphone maker by sales in the third quarter of 2020, according to data by Gartner. Xiaomi's market share has grown as Huawei's sales have suffered after it was blacklisted by the U.S. and its smartphones were cut off from essential ser-

vices from Google.

Separately, the Commerce Department put China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC) on the entity list, an economic blacklist that forbids U.S. firms from exporting or transferring technology with the companies named unless permission

has been obtained from the U.S. government. The move comes after about 60 Chinese companies were added to the list in December, including drone maker DJI and semiconductor firm SMIC.

CNOOC has been involved in offshore drilling in the

disputed waters South China Sea, where Beijing has overlapping territorial claims with other countries including Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Taiwan, and Malaysia.

"China's reckless and belligerent actions in the South China Sea and its aggressive push to acquire sensitive intellectual property and technology for its militarization efforts are a threat to U.S. national security and the security of the international community," U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross said in a statement.

"CNOOC acts as a bully for the People's Liberation Army to intimidate China's neighbors, and the Chinese military continues to benefit from government civil-military fusion policies for malign purposes," Ross said.

A CNOOC spokesperson said in a statement that it will "continue to monitor the progress," acknowledging that the company had been put on the entity list. □

## EU court opinion leaves Facebook more exposed over privacy

By KELVIN CHAN

AP Business Writer

**LONDON (AP)** — Any EU country can take legal action against companies like Facebook over cross-border violations of data privacy rules, not just the main regulator in charge of the company, a top court adviser said Wednesday.

The preliminary opinion is part of a long-running legal battle between Facebook and Belgium's data protection authority over the company's use of cookies to track the behavior of internet users, even those who weren't members of the social network.

The advice from the European Court of Justice's Advocate General Michal Bobek potentially paves the way for an onslaught of fresh data privacy cases across the EU, experts said. The opinion, which is often followed by the court,



This March 29, 2018 file photo shows the Facebook logo on screens at the Nasdaq MarketSite, in New York's Times Square.

Associated Press

comes ahead of a formal decision by the ECJ's judges expected later this year. Facebook argues that the Belgian watchdog, which launched the case in 2015, no longer has jurisdiction after the EU's strict General Data Protection Regulation took effect in 2018. The company says that under GDPR, only one national data protection authority

has the power to handle legal cases involving cross-border data complaints - a system known as "one-stop shop." In Facebook's case, it's the Data Protection Commission in Ireland, where the company's European headquarters is based.

"The lead data protection authority cannot be deemed as the sole en-

forcer of the GDPR in cross-border situations, and must, in compliance with the relevant rules and time limits provided for by the GDPR, closely cooperate with the other data protection authorities concerned," the opinion said. Facebook interpreted it as a victory.

"We are pleased that the Advocate General has reaffirmed the value and principles of the one-stop-shop mechanism, which was introduced to ensure the efficient and consistent application of GDPR," said Associate General Counsel Jack Gilbert. "We await the Court's final verdict." Privacy advocates and experts, however, said the advice could change how data privacy cases are handled, by taking the pressure off a single watchdog.

Johnny Ryan, a senior fellow at the Irish Council for

Civil Liberties, said Bobek is signalling that Ireland's privacy watchdog "can no longer use its status as lead authority for Google, Facebook, etc. to hold up enforcement of the GDPR across the EU."

The Irish watchdog has faced criticism for not dealing quickly enough with a rising pile of cross-border data privacy cases involving big tech companies since GDPR took effect. It issued its first such penalty to Twitter last month, fining it for a security breach, but still has about two dozen more to go.

Businesses could also face a bigger compliance burden responding to more privacy cases in multiple EU markets, because it would be easier for people to file complaints to their local privacy watchdog, said Cillian Kieran, CEO of privacy compliance start-up Etyca. □



# Trump administration slashes imperiled spotted owls' habitat

By GILLIAN FLACCUS

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) —

The Trump administration said Wednesday that it would slash millions of acres of protected habitat designated for the imperiled northern spotted owl in Oregon, Washington state and Northern California, much of it in prime timber locations in Oregon's coastal ranges.

Environmentalists immediately decried the move and accused the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under President Donald Trump of taking a parting shot at protections designed to help restore the species in favor of the timber in-



In this May 8, 2003, file photo, a Northern Spotted Owl flies after an elusive mouse jumping off the end of a stick in the Deschutes National Forest near Camp Sherman, Ore.

Associated Press

dustrial. The tiny owl is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act and was rejected for an upgrade to endangered status last year by the federal agency despite losing nearly 4% of its population

annually.

"This revision guts protected habitat for the northern spotted owl by more than a third. It's Trump's latest parting gift to the timber industry and another blow to a species that needs all the protections it can get to fully recover," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Timber groups applauded the decision, which won't take effect for 60 days. □



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Presidential unit at Casa Del Mar for week 2, room 1511. 2 bedroom, 2 bath, full kitchen, dining room, pool and fitness center. Asking \$16,000. Call USA, 845-239-2918 or email garyhudak684@comcast.net.

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All Inclusive.  
Prime week, studio deluxe unit. Sleeps 2. Cost of food and liquor package extra. Cost of ownership \$12,000. Call USA 845-239-2918 or email garyhudak684@comcast.net.

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### Casa del Mar 2BR/2B

week 1/1408 (15k);  
week 2/1113 (16k);  
week 5/1315 (18k);  
week 5&6/1521 (20k/Wk.);  
week 7&8/1408 (18k/Wk.);  
week 8/1113; 8/1409 (17k/wk.);  
week 9/1218 (15k);  
week 10/1207 (15k);  
weeks 11-15 also available!  
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U.S. (860)992-3890

212588

## SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

		7	6		3	5		
4	6						2	9
		9	2		7	8		
5								1
		8	1		9	4		
2	9						6	3
		3	9		5	1		

Difficulty Level ★★★★★

1/16

Solution on Page 14



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## Stars return to inauguration, with J.Lo, Gaga set to perform

By **JOCELYN NOVECK**  
AP National Writer

The A-list is back. How A-list? Try Lady Gaga and J. Lo.

Inauguration officials announced on Thursday that the glittery duo would appear in person on Jan. 20, with Gaga singing the national anthem as Joe Biden and Kamala Harris are sworn in on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol, and Jennifer Lopez giving a musical performance.

Foo Fighters, John Legend and Bruce Springsteen will offer remote performances, and Eva Longoria and Kerry Washington will introduce segments of the event.

Later that day, Tom Hanks will host a 90-minute prime-time TV special celebrating Biden's inauguration. Other performers include Justin Timberlake, Jon Bon Jovi, Demi Lovato and Ant Clemons.

Despite a raging pandemic that is forcing most inaugural events online, it was a sign that Hollywood was back and eager to embrace the new president-elect four years after many big names stayed away from the inauguration of President Donald Trump, hugely unpopular in Hollywood.



In this Nov. 2, 2020 file photo, Lady Gaga performs during a drive-in rally for then Democratic presidential candidate former Vice President Joe Biden at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh.

Associated Press

The question: How would the star wattage play across the country as Biden seeks to unite a bruised nation? Eric Dezenhall, a Washington crisis management consultant and former Reagan administration official, predicted reaction would fall "along tribal lines."

"I think it all comes down to the reinforcement of pre-existing beliefs," Dezenhall said. "If you're a Biden supporter, it's nice to see Lady Gaga perform." But,

he added, "what rallied Trump supporters was the notion of an uber-elite that had nothing to do at all with them and that they couldn't relate to."

Presidential historian Tevi Troy quipped that the starry Gaga-J. Lo lineup was not A-list, but D-list — "for Democratic."

"When Democrats win you get the more standard celebrities," said Troy, author of "What Jefferson Read, Ike Watched and Obama Tweeted: 200 Years of Pop-

ular Culture in the White House." "With Republicans you tend to get country music stars and race-car drivers." Referring to Lady Gaga's outspoken support for the Biden-Harris ticket, he said he was nostalgic for the days when celebrities were not so political. "Call me a hopeless romantic, but I liked the old days when Bob Hope or Frank Sinatra would come to these events and they were not overtly political," he said. Still, he said,

Biden's unity message won't be derailed. "In the end, I don't think having Lady Gaga or J. Lo is all that divisive," he said.

Attendance at the inauguration will be severely limited, due to both the pandemic and fears of continued violence, following last week's storming of the Capitol.

Outside the official events, one of the more prominent galas each inauguration is The Creative Coalition's quadrennial ball, a benefit for arts education. This year, the ball is entirely virtual. But it is star-studded nonetheless: The event, which will involve food being delivered simultaneously to attendees in multiple cities, will boast celebrity hosts including Jason Alexander, David Arquette, Matt Bomer, Christopher Jackson, Ted Danson, Lea Delaria, Keegan Michael-Key, Chrissy Metz, Mandy Patinkin and many others. Robin Bronk, CEO of the non-partisan arts advocacy group, said she's been deluged with celebrities eager to participate in some way. The event typically brings in anywhere from \$500,000 to \$2.5 million, and this year the arts community is struggling like never before. □

## Mr. WorldWide to NASCAR: Pitbull joins Trackhouse ownership



Pitbull performs prior to a NASCAR Cup Series auto race at Phoenix Raceway in Avondale Ariz., in this Sunday, March 8, 2020, file photo.

Associated Press

By **JENNA FRYER AP**  
Auto Racing Writer

**CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP)** — New NASCAR team Track-

house Racing has brought entertainer Pitbull on as an ownership partner for an organization making its debut next month at the Daytona 500.

Trackhouse made the Friday announcement with a video on Twitter in which the Grammy winner is featured dancing to an "I believe we will win" chant. He also holds signs that say: "Knuckle Up. Fight Hard. Buckle Up. Fight hard."

The Cuban-American, known also as "Mr. Worldwide," joins NBA Hall of Famer Michael Jordan as celebrity owners entering NASCAR this year. Jordan is a part owner of 23XI Racing with Denny Hamlin.

"I've been a fan of the

NASCAR story since the movie 'Days of Thunder,'" Pitbull said in a statement. "We are going to show the world NASCAR is not only a sport but a culture." Pitbull noted the announcement coincided with his 40th birthday on Friday: "So get ready! Dale!" he ended with his signature tagline that translates to "Let's go!"

Trackhouse was launched late last year by former driver Justin Marks, who struggled to find a charter that guarantees entry into every Cup Series race on the schedule. He ultimately leased one from Spire Motorsports to get his organization on the grid.

The team has hired Daniel

Suarez to drive the No. 99 Chevrolet but it will not be NASCAR's first pairing of a Latino driver and team owner. Juan Pablo Montoya, a Colombian, drove for Chip Ganassi Racing when it was part owned by Felix Sabates, a Cuban. Suarez is Mexican. □

### SOLUTION SUDOKU

Difficulty Level: \*\*\*\*

1/16

2	8	1	5	9	6	3	4	7
5	4	6	2	3	7	9	1	8
3	9	7	4	1	8	5	6	2
7	3	4	6	5	1	8	2	9
1	6	2	9	8	3	4	7	5
9	5	8	7	4	2	6	3	1
6	2	3	8	7	5	1	9	4
8	7	6	1	6	4	2	5	3
4	1	5	3	2	9	7	8	6

Puzzle on Page 13







# Tight games this weekend, with one upset projected

By **BARRY WILNER**  
AP Pro Football Writer

Aaron, meet Aaron. And Aaron. Aaron Donald, the unanimous All-Pro defensive tackle who owns a couple of Defensive Player of the Year awards, certainly hopes to meet fellow All-Pro Aaron Rodgers on Saturday — in the Packers' backfield. Donald hopes to put the star quarterback on the ground a few times, too. Same for when Green Bay running back Aaron Jones comes in the vicinity of the Los Angeles Rams' dynamic D-lineman.

For the Rams to have a strong chance of advancing to the NFC championship game, they need Donald and the top-rated defense he anchors to, well, sink the Pack.

"He's a special, special player," Rodgers says. "Obviously a first-ballot Hall of Famer. Impact player every single year, a guy that you have to game-plan for, have to be aware of where he's at at all times, and just one of those special talents that we haven't seen a whole lot of in this game in the history of the game. A lot of credit to him, the way he takes care of himself, his motor and he's somebody that you gotta be worried about."

Naturally, the Rams should be worried about Rodgers and a four-pronged offense featuring the ver-



Nurse shark on the Saba Bank which is part of the Yarari Marine Mammal and Shark Sanctuary.  
Photo credit: Hans Leijnse (SHAPE/DCNA)

satile Jones, All-Pro receiver Davante Adams in the midst of a career season, and breakout tight end Robert Tonyan. The LA offense also hasn't been special. Jared Goff will start at quarterback with John Wolford inactive one week after incurring a neck injury against Seattle.

Los Angeles is a 7 1-2-point underdog at Green Bay. With about 6,500 fans in attendance, the home-field advantage will be less than it is normally, but frigid Lambeau for a team from So-Cal? It will be close, but...

**PACKERS, 23-19**

**KNOCKOUT POOL:** For those with all options open, go

with KANSAS CITY. But don't expect a rout.

Baltimore (plus 3 1-2) at Buffalo, Saturday  
John Harbaugh has a pretty amazing NFL record: eight road playoff victories. He snapped a tie with Hall of Famer Tom Landry and Tom Coughlin when the Ravens won at Tennessee.

This is a much bigger challenge. Buffalo has won seven straight, has a far better defense than the Titans, and a more dangerous passing attack. The Bills' win against Indianapolis was tight, but also had to be a huge confidence boost for a franchise that last advanced in the play-

offs in 1995.

Of course, the performance by Lamar Jackson in his first postseason win after two defeats, and Baltimore's defense shutting down 2,000-yard rusher Derrick Henry, bodes well for the Ravens.

Just not quite well enough.

**BUFFALO, 26-24**

Cleveland (plus 10) at Kansas City, Sunday  
Another team with a swell of confidence has to be the Browns. That they mauled the self-destructing Steelers should be taken into account, but that offense was impressive, and the defense was a takeaway machine. One trouble for

Cleveland is that the D showed some real vulnerability after building the big lead at Pittsburgh. Sure, the Browns were able to get conservative, but don't try that against Patrick Mahomes and the reigning champions.

KC has been idle since the regular-season finale, when several important regulars were rested. So rustiness is a consideration. Losing probably isn't, but this spread is too wide.

**BEST BET: CHIEFS, 30-24**

Tampa Bay (plus 3 1-2) at New Orleans, Sunday  
Old-timers day at the Superdome. Tom Brady and Drew Brees are a collective 85 years old. They also are headed to Canton five years after they retire — if they ever do — and will take lots of records with them.

The Saints won both meetings between these NFC South rivals during the regular season. The team that swept the regular-season series has won 14 of the previous 22 matchups. And New Orleans was the previous team in such a situation, achieving the sweep by beating Carolina 31-26 in the wild-card round after sweeping the Panthers in the 2017 regular season.

We don't have to pick an upset, but we're not going against TB12.

**UPSET SPECIAL: BUCCANEERS, 24-23.** □

## NBA fines Irving \$50,000 for health, safety violations



Utah Jazz's Derrick Favors (15) defends Brooklyn Nets' Kyrie Irving (11) during the second half of an NBA basketball game Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2021, in New York.

Associated Press

By **BRIAN MAHONEY**

AP Basketball Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — Kyrie Irving's absence from the Brooklyn Nets has become a costly one.

The NBA fined the point guard \$50,000 on Friday for violating its health and safety protocols, and said he could return to team activities Saturday.

The league added that he would forfeit his salary for each game he misses during a five-day quarantine period that would end Saturday if he continues to test negative for the coronavirus. He's already missed two, which means he has lost nearly \$900,000

of his \$33.5 million salary. Irving has missed the last five games while away from the Nets for personal reasons. He was seen in a video on social media during his absence at an indoor family party while not wearing a mask.

The league's protocols prohibit attending indoor social gatherings of 15 or more people or entering bars, lounges, clubs or similar establishments.

Irving is the second player to be fined for that. The other is his new teammate, James Harden.

The Nets have not ex-

plained the reasons for Irving's absence, leaving it to him to do when he returns. Their next game is Saturday against Orlando, though coach Steve Nash said Friday he had no update about when Irving would rejoin the team.

"Without a doubt, the organization's disappointed with not having any one of our players, in this particular case Kyrie, not amongst us, not in the trenches with us and so forth," general manager Sean Marks said Thursday during a news conference to discuss the trade for Harden. □